

# Van Fleet's Position . . . . . By Marquis Childs

## Opportunity to Show Loyalty, Self Discipline

THE three-alarm fire set off by President Eisenhower's proposal to free the Nationalist Chinese forces of Chiang



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Kaishhek is subsiding. It took hard work by some valiant fire fighters to bring that outbreak under control.

But the heat is still there and the flames can be fanned up again unless the proper precautions are taken. Following his retirement as commander of United Nations forces in Korea, Gen. James Van Fleet is returning to Washington. At least four congressional committees are competing for the general's testimony. Little imagination is required to see the sensational headlines that can come out of such a situation.

During the past year Van Fleet has made no secret of his views. To distinguished visitors from America he expressed his disgust with the prolonged truce negotiations. As a fighting man, struggling to keep up the morale of his forces during the long stalemate, he felt almost intolerably irked by what he considered to be the harmful intervention of politicians and diplomats just at a point when he believed the destruction of the Communist armies was possible.

This is, of course, what many of the Republican majority on both the Armed Services and the Foreign Relations Committees want to hear. Rehashing the tragedy of the Korean war, they can pile the blame on the Truman Administra-

tion. In kind, if not in degree, the Van Fleet hearings could become another sensation such as the investigation into the reasons for the recall of Gen. Douglas MacArthur by President Truman.

FROM another perspective, too, the Van Fleet story has a great attraction for Republicans pushing an activist policy in Asia. Shortly before he left his post in Korea, General Van Fleet answered questions put to him by the Associated Press. He was asked whether the United Nations forces could mount an offensive against the Communists at the present time.

The general's answer was yes. A commander in the field would almost inevitably have to make such a reply, since to say no would be an admission bound to have an adverse effect on morale.

Those who want to believe that an offensive now will bring an end of the war will naturally welcome this testimony. They can be counted on to prod General Van Fleet. As a valiant soldier proud of the troops he led, the general can be counted on to make stouthearted answers to questions about the striking power of the U. N. army.

Here is the fuel for a new outburst of emotionalism that would encourage the persistent illusion that there is a quick and magical way to bring the Korean war to an end. All the old slogans—get tough, go it alone, let's get it over with—will be trotted out once again. The shattering effect of the storm over Formosa, now subsiding, will make itself felt both at home and abroad.

IN THE well-deserved interval of rest he enjoys in Hawaii on the way back it,

seems a shame to intrude business and politics. But it will be a service to General Van Fleet and the country if the Army briefs him on the ordeal by congressional committee ahead of him. As a soldier completely immersed in running a war, he may find guidance on Washington and the booby traps of politics extremely helpful.

American impatience was stirred by a lot of the oratory on Korea in the campaign last fall. A letter from General Van Fleet made public by his wife suggested that the training of South Koreans had not progressed rapidly enough. Candidate Eisenhower said that Asians should fight Asians. All that is in the past and the new President must cope with fearful reality of a stalemated war that has been going on for nearly three years.

Van Fleet and Eisenhower were classmates at West Point. That is an enduring bond on which their later friendship has been built. If General Van Fleet wants to help his old friend, who today carries such a terrible burden of responsibility, he will try to avoid relighting the political fires on the issue of Korea.

Part of the disconcerting babel over foreign policy comes from retiring soldiers and diplomats who break into headlines the day after they step out of office. This has done much harm in recent years. Telling all, or almost all, has caused repeated embarrassment and worse to officials who must continue to carry on American policy in difficult and dangerous posts. General Van Fleet has an opportunity to show that his loyalty and self-discipline are as great as his valor.

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See Marquis Childs on "Washington Spotlight," Fridays at 7:15 p. m. on WNBW, Channel 4.